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ABSTRACT

Empire State College (ESC), a statewide college without a campus, requires Nontraditional concepts of faculty, since their role as mentor in a contractual learning situation is more diverse than that of a traditional faculty member. The ESC mentor role involves several activities: advisement, intellectual development, evaluation, college development, and personal career development. In the faculty's attempt to carry out those functions five stages of development generally evolve -- antitraditionalism, estrangement, confrontation, turnaround and committment, and renewal. The importance of identifying these five stages of innovative faculty development is that in knowing about them steps can be taken to accelerate their completion. New and prospective mentors can profit from an understanding of these stages and of the problems they are likely to encounter. (Author/KE)

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A ROLE FOR FACULTY IN CONTRACT LEARNING: TOWARD A THEORY OF NONTRADITIONAL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

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A ROLE FOR FACULTY IN CONTRACT LEARNING: TOWARD A THEORY OF NONTRADITIONAL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

A. Paul Bradley, Jr.

Empire State College (ESC), a Statewide[1] college without a campus, requires nontraditional conceptions of faculty for ESC differs from other academic institutions in four basic ways. First, at Empire, each student's degree program is shaped by both the student's and College's educational objectives. At most institutions, student objectives are not a determining factor in the curriculum. Second, the elements of the learning contracts which are the building blocks of the degree program are formulated by the student with the advice and consent of faculty at ESC. In traditional institutions, the mode and pace of learning are fixed by the institution. Third, student learning contracts draw upon the vast learning resources of the State: tutors, work-study opportunities, internships, courses at other institutions, museums, libraries, etc. At most institutions, classroom instruction is the primary mode. Fourth, ESC recognizes and credits documented prior learning regardless of how that learning came about. There is usually no way to recognize prior informal learning at most institutions.

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[1]Empire has nearly 30 locations including regional learning centers of 13-16 mentors covering a variety of disciplines and areas of study; learning units with a full-time professional staff of only one to three mentors who rely heavily on part-time assistance, and special programs that meet particular student needs (e.g., Center for Labor Studies).

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While the student has great responsibility under this system, he or she receives much assistance from ESC's faculty members, called mentors, whose role is considerably more diverse than that of a traditional faculty member.

In 1973, the Empire State College Office of Research and Evaluation conducted intensive interviews with all mentors, as well as other staff at the regional learning centers to learn about the role and mentor views of it. In 1974, we developed and administered a Mentor Questionnaire (MQ) thus providing quantifiable data to go along with the subjective interview findings. Results of the study are reported in a forthcoming monograph entitled Mentor: An Emerging Faculty Role. This paper briefly summarizes the principal findings and presents an evolving theory of nontraditional faculty development.

Before beginning, here are a few pertinent statistics. Empire now has 86 full-time mentors with 30 lines to be added in fiscal year 1975-76. As a group, they seem to represent a fairly typical faculty (Bayer, 1970). The average age is 40 with a range from 26 to 62. One-third are women. Fifty-nine percent have doctorates. While they average four years teaching experience in traditional settings, many have held positions outside of education including director of a settlement house, labor leader, publisher, newspaper reporter, sales manager, museum curator, printer. Furthermore, on a Mentor Questionnaire item, high percentages of respondents stated as personal goals such things as: "more direct, personal, individaul contact with students" (97%); "learn to work better with a variety of learning resources both within and outside of the College" (84%); "work more with adult, experienced population" (76%); "learn to work better with students outside my discipline" (70%). Thus, while appearing on the surface to be typical, the mentors are a somewhat uncommon group of faculty members.

Mentor Role

The ESC mentor role involves five activities: advisement, intellectual development, evaluation, College development, and personal career development. Some of these are closely related and are performed almost simultaneously. This part of the paper presents a microscopic summary of each activity.

Mentors generally meet with students in face-to-face conferences. This enhances the possibility of personal, vocational, and academic counseling. Mentors also help students untangle intricacies in the ESC procedures and bureaucracy by acting as ombudsmen. While some are uncomfortable in such close interaction with students, most strongly endorse the importance of this aspect of the role.

A major function of mentors is helping bring about intellectual development in students. Faculty have generally done this either by acting as "tutor" for their students or as "facilitator." In the former mode, the mentor tends to use him or herself as the primary learning resource. The "facilitator," on the other hand, employs a variety of the State's learning resources -- fellow mentors, faculty and/or courses at other institutions, internships, work-study, SUNY Independent Study courses, ESC learning modules -- and teaches in response to student questions. Written role statements about mentors describe as desirable the "facilitator" mode.

Mentors serve as evaluators both in groups and as individuals. In committee, they review students' individualized degree programs, portfolios for advanced standing, and candidacy for graduation. However, the greater part of this function is evaluating the work that students perform in learning contracts. This involves criticizing papers, face-to-face discussions, and completing the Digest and Evaluation forms that become part of the permanent record. Some mentors report uneasiness over this aspect of their role because there is little precedent for determining the parameters of quality work within the ESC framework.

Obtaining appropriate faculty involvement in College development both at the local and Statewide level has, at times, been difficult to achieve. One reason is that it took over two years to approve and implement By-Laws. In addition, ESC's Statewide "campus" creates geographical difficulties. For example, there are only two All-College Meetings a year (though there are many smaller gatherings involving representatives from the entire College) which raises the possibility of mentors feeling more loyalty to their local center or unit than to the College as a whole. Contributing to the overall governance problem is what Corson (1960) called the "enigma" of faculty involvement in decision-making: a comprehensive claim of competence on the one hand, and reticence to participate on the other. Because widespread participation is essential to a dynamic "professional organization" (Etzioni, 1964), the College must continue its attempts to find the appropriate level for mentor involvement in governance and planning.

Many mentors, particularly in the 1973 interviews, expressed concern over chances to enhance their personal professional development at Empire. Since then, several weeks throughout the year have been set aside in which mentors are not expected to meet with students. In addition, many have now received professional leaves (for travel, to help develop self-study learning modules, to plan short-term residencies, etc.), but others have yet to have such opportunities. Because a non-traditional faculty member must be prepared to work effectively with students in a variety of areas, it is imperative that Empire continue to encourage mentor professional development.

The predominate findings of the interviews were that mentors are committed to their students and to being effective. However, five problem areas were also uncovered by the interviews and further examined in the Mentor Questionnaire: concern over workload, concern over professional development, problems with identifying and

tapping learning resources, concern over mentor role in decision-making, and anxiety. The MQ affirmed the first four of these patterns. For example, 92% stated that the ESC workload was greater than in traditional institutions, 81% agreed that "I almost never get to spend four hours in uninterrupted reading, writing, or research in any specialty," 24% identified access to library facilities as "a serious problem," and 47% noted that they were "not satisfied" with their involvement in certain administrative decisions. However, there seems to be a lessening in overall anxiety among mentors. Secondary analysis[1] provided additional information in three areas: (1) as student load increases, so increases concern over workload and professional development; (2) mentors with less previous experience in traditional institutions are more likely to identify problems in using external learning resources,[2] and (3) "less satisfied" mentors[3] tend to mention problems in using learning resources and concerns over their role in decision-making. Overall "satisfaction" is not statistically related to such dimensions as a mentor's regional learning center, years of experience, student load, or reasons for coming to Empire.

Thus, the two parts of the mentor study reveal a diverse role and some initial problem areas for the three-year old nontraditional college. The next section, based on our own findings and the scant pertinent literature that exists, presents an evolving theory of nontraditional faculty development.

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[1]This included chi-square and t-test techniques significant to the .05 level.

[2]This may indicate that younger mentors are more likely to try to "facilitate" while older mentors, with their greater experience to draw upon, "tutor."

[3]A "satisfaction" index was determined by assigning scores according to responses on certain satisfaction-related items.

Toward A Theory of Nontraditional Faculty Development

The field of developmental psychology has concentrated on children and adolescents until the past few years when several researchers including Kohlberg and Mayer (1972), Levinson (1974), and Gould (1972) began looking at adult development. An aim of their studies is to identify a hierarchy of personality growth stages through which adults pass as they mature into middle and old age. Ralph (1973) and Hodgkinson (1974) have recently applied some of the adult development concepts to faculty and, in the latter case, administrators. Using some of their ideas and borrowing heavily from a Ralph and Freedman (1974) paper which described faculty at several innovative colleges, this section presents an evolving theory of stages in faculty development at Empire State College and other nontraditional institutions.

Stage One - Anti-Traditionalism

Faculty accept positions at nontraditional colleges because they are both attracted by the philosophy featuring concern for students as individuals and conversely reject certain traditional educational practices. For example, 67% of the Empire respondents to the Mentor Questionnaire said that they came to the College because of "dissatisfaction with traditional programs." In short, they are "...no longer certain that traditional approaches can prepare students to cope effectively with rapid social changes." (Ralph and Freedman, 1973, p. 70) In some cases, this leads to personal distrust of anything appearing to be traditional (i.e., disciplinary and structured). "As a result, remnants of traditional models are abandoned with a vengeance in the early stages of these colleges." (Ralph and Freedman, p. 72) Some of these remnants include tests, grades, majors, distribution requirements, clear course and program plans,[1] faculty rank distinctions,

[1]At Empire with its learning contracts, many faculty vehemently defend the organic exploratory contract in which a student and mentor make weekly decisions on what to learn about until the student finds his/her particular interest.

and regular "class" schedules. Also, most decisions are made by the entire faculty unit rather than allowing administrator authority over broad areas.

While it is useful for faculty to shed certain vestiges of their previous teaching styles, a problem with the "anti traditionalism" stage is that it is essentially nonconstructive. After abandoning old forms, faculty find it difficult to build new ones, in part, because of their own suspicions at arything that looks at all like a "traditional" structure. Furthermore, the practice of operating by consensus makes decision-making an arduous, painstaking, and for some unhappy process.[1] MacDonald observed on this point:

> "Recently, I witnessed their [faculty] delay and finally abandonment of a crucial question: Fairhaven's academic direction, its goals and needs. Conversation on this important topic took four hours, was often gifted, even cogent, but it was indecisive to a fault." (p. 210)

In consensus, almost any strongly held opinion tends to block action. An additional reason for slow creation of new structures is:

> ...administrative energies are likely to be focused on resolving the reciprocal antagonisms and stereotyping between the parent college and the innovative college, trying to explain the new college to the parent administration, board of trustees, evaluating committees, and the surrounding community and, similarly, to explain the actions of these bodies to members of the innovative college. Little time and energy is left for developing internal procedures and structures. (Ralph & Freedman, p. 73)[2]

Thus, because of the "vengeance" with which nontraditional faculty discard forms, a sense of immobility can easily permeate the college.

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[1]At a recent meeting of the Saratoga staff, two Senators made reports. The first read By-Laws changes and asked if the staff agreed that these were in fact the changes made at the recent rather confusing All-College Meeting. The second Senator represented the "Committee for a Sane Agenda." Its only plank is that future All-College Meetings will not discuss By-Laws, a three-year topic.

[2]Empire State has in three and one-half years, to mention only the high points, been founded, prepared a four year Master Plan, developed and written up its academic program for registration with the State University and State Education Department, and undertaken a Self-Study for accreditation by the Middle States Association and the State Education Department. However, internal procedures and structures also were developed.

Stage Two - Estrangement

Several factors help lead nontraditional faculty into estrangement. The sense of immobility described above will disturb some, especially those less tolerant of ambiguity. Others find that "...students are frequently omnivorous with respect to faculty time." (Kenneth Freeman in MacDonald, p. 32) After spending sometimes hours discussing a personal or academic problem, there is little energy left for individual scholarly activities. This saturated feeling has been clearly prevalent among ESC mentors at various times since the College's founding, as noted often in the interviews and on the Mentor Questionnaire. What is particularly different and draining for them is the great amount of face-to-face contact with students (four students a day, five days a week) plus the paperwork demands of contract learning. As unfinished paperwork piles up, harsh feelings toward the Saratoga Springs Coordinating Center bureaucracy seem to increase. A third factor leading to estrangement is that, according to Ralph and Freedman, all faculty, regardless of their expectations, are "...quite unprepared for the environment" (p. 74) and are surprised and disappointed. They experience an educational culture shock. One type of faculty illustrated in the meager literature have a student-oriented teaching style. While probably having a high likelihood of becoming excellent nontraditional faculty, these people sometimes find themselves prey to "rip-off artists" ("...gripers, conmen, escapists from the regular school, the 'easy riders,' fifteen-units-for-doing-nothing anarchists...") (Ralph and Freedman, p. 74) Another group of faculty discover that their style and interests are more traditional than they thought. For them, the innovative setting can be especially unsettling.

Ralph and Freedman suggest that "despite intentions to the contrary, most faculty continue to teach in fairly standard ways." (Ralph and Freedman, p. 75)

The various contributors to Five Experimenting Colleges (MacDonald, 1973) strongly back this notion. While it is difficult at Empire with its reliance on one-to-one relationships to "teach in standard ways," the earlier observations about "tutoring" as opposed to "facilitating" plus the appearance of "group studies" at the regional learning centers seem to support the contention. However, traditional ways do not fit well overall into the unconventional settings.

The result of estrangement among faculty is generally heightened anxiety which is manifest in a few as bitterness and negativism toward the new setting. Others suffer a loss of self-esteem and confidence in their ability to handle the work, some questioning the wisdom of coming to the nontraditional setting. During this time many procrastinate on duties and work falls behind.

At Empire, one of the serious "red tape" problems for students continues to be the sometimes lengthy de ays between learning contract completion and filing of "Digest and Evaluation" forms by mentors. As the pile of late "Digests and Evaluations" grows, there seems to be a greater tendency for a mentor to lash out at the Coordinating Center, "bureaucracy," and the like.

Stage Three - Confrontation

Most faculty overcome the anxieties of the estrangement stage by realizing "...that half-way modifications of a traditional approach are not really so innovative as they and their students wish..." (Ralph and Freedman, p. 75) They thus must confront two discomforting prospects - either a change in behavior or a return to traditional programs. The major change for many is to relinquish the role as sole authority. In some institutions, this means such things as team teaching and consulting with students in designing courses. At Empire, it means using tutors and other resources rather than relying primarily on oneself as expert. It also means sharing authority with students in developing degree programs and in deciding content and evaluation procedures on contracts.

The stage of confrontation is a brief but intensive and exciting one. A mentor must at this time weigh his personal needs and interests and decide whether to leave the nontraditional setting or to make the appropriate efforts at redirecting his/her teaching style. It is a basic internal debate involving educational philosophy, commitment to students, commitment to a discipline, and orientation of career.[1]

Stage Four - Turnaround and Commitment

The change from traditional teaching techniques to student-oriented methods is made in small steps beginning for some even before arriving at the nontraditional institution. Gradually, faculty create personal mentoring models which seem to work for them. Most important according to Ralph and Freedman, "they become sensitive to the character-developing functions of teaching and to personal development as well as academic achievement." (p. 78) A problem for some faculty is that "in avoiding the Scylla of authoritarianism, they may veer toward the Charybdis of the opposite pole." (Ralph and Freedman, p. 76) But primarily the stage four innovative faculty member is a person who is confidently reorienting him or herself through daily trial-and-error personalized instruction which focuses on the whole person. At Empire, this is illustrated by more rigorous evaluation coupled with increased use throughout the College of tutors and adjuncts as well as other learning resources: internships, courses at other institutions, work-study, and the like. In addition, mentors at this stage firmly defend as legitimate learning that occurs outside the classroom.

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[1]Though Empire State has not experienced the 100% and higher turnover rates of some innovative programs, some mentors have departed. One stated notably: "I simply found out that what I really like is conducting research."

An important component of stage four is the institutional environment. Just as the faculty member's own modus operandi is becoming more internally consistent and coherent, so also is the institution's. Procedures, evaluation standards, resources; all are developing. This helps reduce confusion and with that, tension. The environment becomes more organized albeit in a way different from the traditional programs that the faculty are trying to leave behind.

Stage Five - Renewal

Jose Ortega y Gasset (1944, p. 51) felt that the "organization of higher education must be based on the student (not the professor or knowledge). Its two dimensions are: (1) what he [the student] is, a being of limited capacity, and (2) what he needs to know in order to live his life." In a stage of "renewal," the faculty member has lost sight of the difference between cognitive and affective goals and is concerned simply with the student as a growing person. He/she now has a personal unified but dynamic philosophy and style of teaching which links the isolated experience models that were identified as successful in stage four. The philosophy is regularly modified as new experiences are gained but remains cohesive. Henry Murray (1958) might describe someone at this stage as recognizing a duty to develop and perpetuate those qualities within himself that make him free and responsible. Certainly someone at stage five mentors not for ego, but in order to help others learn to contribute to mankind. This type of personal goal helps perpetuate a strongly positive self-image. Gardner (1963, p. 133) observed that: "In a society capable of renewal, men not only welcome the future and the changes it may bring but believe that they will have a hand in shaping that future." To a faculty member capable of renewal, such orientation to the future is a predominate characteristic.

Figure 1

Stages of Development for Nontraditional Faculty

Stage	Features	ESC Examples
1. anti-traditionalism	anti-authority, rule by consensus, suspicious of structure	Mentor Questionnaire revealed dissatisfaction with traditional, long faculty meeings, "organic" contracts
2. estrangement	organizational immobility, faculty saturated and disappointed (culture shock), high anxiety	workload concerns, high anxiety, loss of confidence, much "tutoring"
3. confrontation	decide to change or leave, high personal intensity and excitement	some departures, concern over "salability"
4. turnaround and commitment	change from role as sole authority, creation of personal mentoring models, interest in personal development, institution becomes understandable, restored confidence	increased use of learning resources, concern about problems using learning resources, ESC procedures developing
5. renewal	concern for whole person, personal dynamic philosophy built from isolated models, future-oriented, positive self-image	interest in exchanging personal models with other mentors, interest in experimenting with new mentoring techniques including learning modules.

Stage five mentors are interested in regularly reexamining current models, exchanging experiences with fellow mentors, and in experimenting with new techniques. For example, some may wish to develop written learning modules that present their unified personal models for all ESC students. Others may wish to video tape mentoring sessions with students. All are concerned with achievement of full potential, their own and their students. The five stages are summarized on Figure 1.

It is unclear whether the five stages of development apply only for the original faculty or if people who join after the program is more established go through the same stages. Currently, it appears that both groups do. For example, procedures at Empire are increasingly well understood by the experienced mentors who helped create them. But to new mentors, these same procedures are often confusing indeed. Thus, though no solid data yet exists, it seems that future faculty will go through the same or similar stages.

A phenomenon noted by researchers looking at adult development is the tendency of some people to become locked at a particular stage while others sometimes even regress. Because we are not following particular individuals in our study,[1] it is difficult to comment on stasis or regression at Empire. However, again using subjective observation, it seems that the two phenomena describe the experience of some ESC mentors.

The importance of these five stages of innovative faculty development is that, in knowing about them, steps can be taken to accelerate their completion. For example, Empire State College can develop a mentor orientation program that will make the uncommon procedures and requirements of mentoring more comprehensible from the beginning. In addition, local administrators -- deans and associate deans -- will be able to recognize symptomatic behavior and help new mentors through

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[1] The Mentor Questionnaire was so anonymous that we omitted several common items--age, sex, specialty, highest degree--that might have allowed an over-zealous researcher to identify the respondent.

uncomfortable times. Finally, new and prospective mentors themselves should profit from an understanding of problems they are likely to encounter. Knowledge of the stages should be similarly useful at other innovative programs.

The ESC Office of Research and Evaluation will continue to study and report on mentors, their role and views. Currently, despite some problems, the evidence[1] seems to indicate that mentoring is a truly promising new conception of faculty.

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[1] See Palola and Bradley (1973) and Lehmann (1974) plus other ESC Office of Research and Evaluation studies and the report of the Middle States Accreditation Team for indications of apparent impact of mentors on students.

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